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ABSTRACT

The problems of Knowville, a small school district (K-12 enrollment: 408) in the central farming region of New York State were examined by a research team from Cornell University. Interviews were conducted with residents of the community, school board members, teachers, administrators, and students in the school. This Knowville case study report is divided into three sections. The first describes the community (geographic location, the school district's history, the community's economic base, civic organizations, and the baseball stadium) and Knowville's wealth measures, which are in the middle range by state standards. The second section considers the school system itself and examines staffing, the buildings, the elementary and high school curricula, special education, guidance services, state test results, and the eligibility policy. The last section looks at the inadequate physical plant and associated problems, including the defeats of various new building proposals, the lack of long range planning on the part of the school board, and the perception of the inhabitants that Knowville is poor in comparison to the relative wealth of neighboring towns. Finally, some suggestions are made as to how Knowville can alleviate its problems. Representative interviewee opinions are included. (JMM)

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A Small Rural Community's Poor and Its Impact on Educational Opportunities*

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Organizational Alternatives for Small-Rural Schools In New York State*

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Introduction

This study focuses on Knowville, a small (K-12 enrollment: 408) school district in the central farming region of New York State. Knowville exhibits many of the strengths of a small rural school, including closeknit relationships amongst students and faculty, strong community support for school activities, and small class size. Knowville also provides some unique opportunities to students for a school its size, such as two full foreign language sequences in the high school and access to advanced courses for students offered at a nearby college.

Knowville, however has its problems, the most immediately obvious of which is an inadequate physical plant. The Knowville Board and Administration, with assistance from the District Superintendent and State Education Department, have been trying for many years to do something about the problems faced by the Knowville school district; as can be expected, there are numerous and often conflicting explanations as to why the district is in its current state, and what the best solution would be for the students and community.

In order to examine the situation in Knowville a team of researchers from Cornell University visited Knowville and spoke to residents of the community, School Board members, teachers, administrators, and students in the school. These interviews were taped and transcribed; quotations from them appear throughout this document. The Cornell team also spoke to present and former

State Education Department (SED) officials involved with Knowville and analyzed data made available by the district and SED. The descriptions, analyses, and recommendations presented below are the results of that research.

This case study is divided into three sections. The first two sections describe the school district and the community and includes demographic data and information about the school's personnel and academic program. The third section discusses the physical plant problem, and uses that as a springboard for looking into the deeper difficulties Knowville faces as a school district. Finally, some thoughts are offered as to what Knowville could do to address those problems.

The Community

The Knowville Central School District covers an area of 58 square miles. It includes the village of Knowville and some farm land surrounding the village. Most of the commerce in the town--two markets, two restaurants, a bank, a service station and the post office--is clustered around one main intersection known as the "four corners;" this is where the major north-south highway through Knowville crosses Main Street.

The north-south state highway connects Knowville to a major interstate highway to the south. The trip along the state highway is a pleasant one, winding past scenic farms dotting the hills and valleys with a Creek running alongside. To the north

of Knowville along the highway the scenery likewise consists of farm fields, barns and silos.

On Main Street to the east of the highway there are several small businesses on either side of the street. Less than a block from the intersection, however, the residential area begins. This consists of older homes with large porches but no numbers. In order to find a particular person's home it is necessary to count houses, eg., "the fifth house down from the bank." Further along Main Street, about 1/2-1 mile from the four corners, there is an Agway Center which services the local farms. There is also a railroad train station.

Continuing east out of the village the road crosses a creek and railroad tracks, then heads out into farm country. On the right is the BOCES Occupational Center, consisting of several buildings and large fields where agriculture students raise crops.

To the west of the four corners on Main Street is a tree-lined residential area with older homes. Several blocks from the four corners is the school property; beyond that, more homes as the road heads out into farm country again.

The school property itself is situated on two levels. The lower level holds the school building and portable classrooms, the bus garage, and the parking lot. The upper level is an athletic field bordered on two sides by woods.

There are more than these two roads through Knowville; they run off these main streets and are mostly residential in the

village and cross farms outside of the village. Overall, Knowville appears to be a small, quiet, residential village.

The school district itself was voted into existence in December, 1926, and began operating as a central district at the start of the 1927-28 school year; it was one of the first central school districts in New York. This original centralization involved a union free school district along with five common school districts.*

Several subsequent annexations occurred. In 1937, two common districts were annexed; in 1943 two more common districts joined Knowville Central. In 1949 one more common district from Knowville was annexed.

For twenty years the boundaries of the Knowville Central School District remained unchanged. Then, in 1969, one more common school district was annexed. This district had been one of two common school districts whose annexation to Knowville was recommended in the 1958 Master Plan for School District Reorganization in New York. (The other district listed in the Plan was annexed to another district in 1958.) There have been no changes in the boundaries of the Knowville Central School District since 1969.

In comparison to other New York school districts, Knowville is neither very wealthy nor very poor. If all the school districts in the State were ranked according to their average

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*Union free school districts may contain a high school; common districts can only operate up to eighth grade.

income per pupil and then divided into quarters, Knowville would rank in the second lowest quarter at $24,475 per pupil, based on information provided by SED. If the same type of ranking were done for property wealth, Knowville would rank in the second highest quarter, with $81,606 per pupil.

When compared to its closest neighbors, however, Knowville appears to be much poorer. Resortville, a popular tourist town to Knowville's north, has a per pupil income of almost $38,000 and a per pupil property wealth of $103,317. Collegetown, the city to Knowville's south, has a per pupil income of over $40,000, with its property wealth similar to Knowville's at $84,810. Thus even though Knowville's wealth measures are in the middle range by State standards, locally they appear to be quite low. This has an effect on how Knowville residents view their ability to pay for educational services, and will be discussed further in section three.

Most Knowville residents work in local industries. Over two-thirds of the adults working were employed in the private sector, with another nine percent self-employed. One percent were listed as unpaid family workers, with the rest employed in various levels of government.

The major areas of employment break down as follows:

Retail trade: 18% (of Knowville residents work in this field)
Health Services: 13%
Educational Services: 13%
Manufacturing: 11%
Agriculture/Forestry/Fisheries/Mines: 8%

The types of occupations held by Knowville school district residents are:

Service Occupations (not protective or household)	16%
Precision production/craft/repair Occupations	14%
Sales Occupations	13%
Administrative Support Occupations/Clerical	13%
Professional Specialty Occupations	11%

Unlike some small communities, Knowville residents are not dependent on one type of industry or occupation for employment.

Most of the working people of Knowville are employed close to home. Ninety-two percent work within the county (twenty-six percent of those within the school district) and commute an average of forty-eight minutes per day.

The industrial base of Knowville itself is small. The main industry within the district is farming, and as we have noted previously, that employs only 8% of the working people in the district.

There were several factories in Knowville in the past. A cheese factory closed in 1952. There was also a factory that made parts for chairs; that closed in 1965. In the village of Knowville there are several small stores, a couple of restaurants, a bank and a gas station.

There are several community organizations which service Knowville. These include: The Rotary Club, the Volunteer Firemen's Association, the American Legion, Rod and Gun Club, and several agricultural organizations, such as the Breeder's Association. There is also a library association and the Knowville Historical Society.

Baseball is a very popular activity in Knowville. The community has supported a semi-pro team for 44 years , believed to be the oldest such organization in the country. Their baseball stadium, according to one longtime resident, is the best in upstate New York except for MacArthur Stadium in Syracuse. It is used by others in the community for Little League, American Legion and high school ball.

Overall, Knowville appears to be a typical central New York school district: a village with a school surrounded by farms, populated by adults who mostly work out of the district.

The School System

The School Staff

There are two administrators in the district, a superintendent and an assistant superintendent. The superintendent has been in the district for 23 years and has tendered his resignation effective June 30, 1987. Because he has been there so long no Board members have experience in selecting a chief school officer. The Board president says that the Board will enlist the aid of the District Superintendent in recruitment and selection. Because the current superintendent gave the district a full year's notice the Board (or a selection committee of the Board) will have the luxury of time to think about the kind of administrator would best serve the needs of the district.

Knowville does not directly employ any non-teaching professional personnel, but rather contracts for their services through

BOCES. The district contracts for dental services, a psychologist, a librarian, speech therapist, resource room teacher, and gifted program coordinator.

The district employs 34 full time teachers, an increase of two over the last two years. The teachers who were interviewed cited numerous advantages to teaching at Knowville. Among them:

> I have a lot of interaction with parents and it's not because I generate it, which I find is amazing ... Here we have conferences for every parent after the first report card and after the third report card; and after the first report card every parent that I didn't see (which was only two) either rescheduled a conference or called me on the phone, so that I have spoken to every parent either personally or on the phone, and I get a lot of notes from parents asking this or that...
>
> There's a very closeknit relationship between the younger kids and the older kids that probably larger schools would not believe. I mean, the high school kids are very kind to the elementary kids and everybody knows everybody else in this type of situation, and that is an advantage.
>
> I have a better relationship with the students in that I know most of them by name and not just at the elementary level. I'm also the only certified reading teacher here so that places me more in a coordinating position. I have the coordination of all the Chapter One programs in this school and in a larger school I might not have the opportunity as quickly as I've got it here because there would be more than one reading specialist. I have a closer relationship with the administration than I would in a bigger school district. So it's a lot easier, I don't feel so remote. I feel a lot freer in terms of what I am able to do, in terms of curriculum. There's so much more cooperation between the teachers, I think, because we are so small and we have to rely on each other and can do a lot more in terms of casually talking about the students we have problems with, what kinds of things this child needs.

When asked about the disadvantages to teaching at Knowville, the teachers unanimously cited the building:

> We need a new facility desperately. We are cramped for space, the building is falling down.
>
> For many years this school has operated on a very tight budget, since I first started teaching here [27 years ago]. We can't afford to do that, but people will complain if we raise the budget, so we have really operated quite reasonably. But now, all of a sudden, everything needs repairs, things have been allowed to kind of slide; you can see it walking through this building.

Overall, the teachers are supportive of the school, but would certainly appreciate better facilities.

Knowville employs 19 non-teaching personnel. These include cafeteria workers, teacher aides, library aides, bus drivers and mechanics, and cleaners. The clerical staff consists of the District Clerk and a secretary. Aides supervise the cafeteria, study halls, bus lines and recess; the teachers have no non-academic responsibilities.

The Building

There is one K-12 building in the district, located in the village of Knowville. The elementary grades are primarily on the first floor of the building with the high school classrooms upstairs and behind the school in several portable classrooms. These portable classrooms are connected to the main building by a wood-and-fiberglass covered walkway.

The district offices were newly remodeled and moved to the basement of the school, making room for additional classroom space on the first floor. The school has both a gymnasium and

auditorium which are located on the first floor of the building. The auditorium doubles as a lunchroom.

As mentioned by the teachers above, space is a major problem. The school dentist's equipment, for example, is set up in a corner of the hallway on the lower level near the offices. The psychologist's office is no larger than a closet, as is the art teacher's room.

In spite of the crowded conditions the district is able to provide as complete a program as other districts of similar size and wealth; in several subject areas, Knowville offers more. A description of Knowville's academic program follows.

The Elementary Program

There are usually two sections of each grade in the elementary school, each section with between fifteen and twenty students. The school is, according to the Assistant Superintendent (who also serves as elementary principal), at the size where there are too many students for one section but not enough to fill two sections. On several occasions the school has had one section each of two grades and a combination class with some students from two grades. For example, last year there was one section of third grade, another of fourth, and a combination third-fourth grade class. This year there is a second-third combination. These combination grades occur when the number of students in two grades is smaller than usual; the community has

been willing to accept combination grades rather than pay for the additional teacher to run small but separate classes.

According the statistics kept by the State Education Department's Bureau of Educational Data Systems (BEDS), the average number of sections of per elementary grade in other districts similar in size to Knowville, is 1.71. Thus Knowville, by offering two sections in all but two grades, is just about average in this respect.

Knowville uses textbook series in the elementary school so that the academic program in a particular subject is consistent over the elementary grades. Every year the program in a particular subject area is reviewed; for example, one year they will review the reading program, the next year they will review social studies. Thus, they change texts (or consider changing texts) approximately every five years.

The High School Curriculum

At the high school level, Knowville offers approximately fifteen more courses (or sections of courses) than other districts similar in size. Again, the source of this data and the statistics that follow concerning course offerings is from the BEDS data file.

A major reason for the difference is the fact that Knowville offers three-year sequences of two languages: French and Spanish. No other school close to Knowville in size does that. Another unusual aspect of Knowville's high school program is a

non-Regents biology course; all of the other schools that size only offer the Regents course. Also, Knowville offers physics and chemistry every year; this was accomplished by 70 percent of the district's with Knowville's enrollment.

Like most of the other similar districts, Knowville offers Algebra in ninth grade, geometry in tenth, and trigonometry in eleventh. They will be switching to the newer Course I, II and III curriculum within the next few years, as required by the State.

As for language arts, Knowville's program is typical. In English there are two sections at each grade level, the higher grades being split Regents-nonRegents. In twelfth grade, there are several electives the students can choose from. In social studies, the required three years is offered; a fourth will be added to comply with the Regents Action Plan.

Knowville offers an average number of art and music classes for a district its size. Band is offered during a homeroom period, so it does not conflict with other courses.

As for vocational courses, Knowville offers seven office procedures courses; schools of similar size typically offer four or five. In industrial arts, however, Knowville offers very few courses. This is due to the shortage of adequate space and equipment. Students who want industrial arts courses, however, need not be deprived. The BOCES Occupational Center is less than two miles from the school; students interested in industrial arts go there for classes.

Educational Technology

Knowville makes use of computer-assisted instruction in its academic program. The district has even had to hire a part-time computer coordinator to supervise the hardware and the software library, and to plan future purchases.

The district uses Apple IIe computers from elementary school right through high school. The computers are, in many cases, tools for learning other subjects, such as reading, math and music. In other instances the computers are themselves the subject of the lessons, as in computer programming and several occupation courses. The remedial teachers use the computers to assist the slower students; at the same time programs designed to help students prepare for college entrance are quite popular.

The following chart provides a more complete breakdown of the uses of computers in Knowville.

Subject Area	Type of Technology (trade name)	Type of Use	# of Students Affected
English	Apple IIe PSAT Prep, SAT Prep, Bank Street Writer	English Class, Creative Writing Class	30
Music	Apple IIe	7th and 8th music class	75
Math	Apple IIe	Comp. Lit.-- 8th and HS, Comp. Prog.-- HS	50
Rem. Reading	Apple IIe	Rem. Reading	20

Business	Apple IIe	Typing Practice for Keyboarding, Intro to Occ.	45
Elementary	Apple IIe	Reading and Math	25
1-8 Remedial	Apple IIe	Reading and Math	35
Guidance	Apple IIe	Financial Aid-12th	20

There are 30 machines available for the district's 408 students.

Special Education

The special education program at Knowville is limited to a Resource Room. There is a full-time teacher who sees twelve students for approximately half an hour a day. There are also eighteen Knowville students who are in a full-time BOCES special education program in a neighboring district.

The Assistant Superintendent is the chairman of the district Committee on the Handicapped; other members include the special education teacher, the school psychologist (contracted through BOCES), the school nurse, and a parent. The Committee meets twice a week to keep abreast of the special education students' programs. There have been controversies in the past when parents refused to accept the Committee's recommendations for their children; in one instance the parents threatened to take the district to court. That confrontation was avoided, and the assistant superintendent now considers the incident a case of "unclear" communications.

Guidance Services

There is one full-time guidance counselor in Knowville. His responsibilities include personal, social, career, and college counseling. He also works with students who need assistance filling out job applications and preparing for interviews.

According to the guidance counselor, a "fair amount" of college recruiters visit Knowville each year. They are mostly from public and private colleges throughout New York, the most distant being the State University College at Geneseo. Local industries do not recruit at Knowville; they do, however, work with the placement counselor at the BOCES center and Knowville students pick up jobs that way.

The Armed Forces recruit at Knowville also. They come to the district once a year for a scheduled visit. If there is an individual student interested in a particular branch of the service, the recruiter will come back to meet one-on-one with the student.

The guidance counselor is comfortable with his position and his case load. Knowville is large enough to support a full-time guidance counselor but small enough to allow him time for all the students; in his words:

> I see every student grade 7-12 a minimum of once. I see seniors three times, juniors a minimum of twice, and everybody else a minimum of once. And that is in a career education type of counseling session; obviously I see someone a lot more than that sometimes.

In Knowville, every high school student receives personal attention from the guidance counselor; that could help to explain why very few Knowville graduates in recent years are unemployed. Approximately 65-70% of Knowville students go on to some kind of formal training after high school. About half of those go on to four-year colleges. Currently there are Knowville graduates at Yale, Cornell, and RPI.

According to the guidance counselor, very few Knowville students flunk out of post-graduate training. He believes the school prepares the students well for college; they "know how to study." Also, because the school is small, the students are "much more responsible, academically, socially," than students from larger schools. That, he feels, is a result of the staff being in a position to know what's going on with the students and being able to monitor them closely.

For those students who do not go on to college there is not a great deal of employment available. The types of jobs the graduates get, according to the guidance counselor, are...

> secretarial jobs or service jobs within the hospitals, some farm work jobs...Collegetown State [college] staff positions. There isn't much around here; that's my main problem, and I wish more kids would leave. They won't.
>
> A lot of the BOCES secretarial students will work for the hospitals. The others would really be unskilled: farm mechanics, farm laborers. Quite frankly there's not a lot that go to work right after high school; it might be four or five a year.

For the even less academically oriented students, the dropouts or potential dropouts, Knowville offers some programs to help those students develop skills that will help them find employment. Again, in the words of the guidance counselor:

> Statistics say our [dropout rates] are pretty high, but I would preface that with the understanding that we have students who drop out, we encourage to continue on with an occupational program over at the occupational center, and they are still considered dropouts but this program is to stop them from dropping out; they don't graduate but they do have some sort of training.
>
> If they do not graduate we call them terminal BOCES. A student comes in to me and says, "Mr. Wuori, I want to drop out," and they we try and interest them in a BOCES curriculum. The kid says, "I want to become an auto mechanic;" we say, "Alright, how about taking auto mechanics for two years, half a day there and half a day's worth of subjects here in Knowville. But they won't necessarily be the subjects you need to graduate. That way, you're training as an auto mechanic, you do not just drop out of school."

It seems that, at least for the last few years, Knowville has been doing a good job of matching its graduates (and non-graduates) to colleges or employment. Members of the school staff are quite proud of the fact that there are very few young people just "hanging out" in Knowville. Again, according to the guidance counselor:

> I used to give an award; starting in 1977, I did it for three years in a row and it was called the "TOY" award, the "Townie of the Year" award. It was given to a student who graduated from here the previous year and was seen hanging around and for a few years there we had many, we had two or three a year and I'd make nominations and this was like an in-joke and I haven't

given that award out in the past six years: they don't hang around anymore.

State Test Results

Knowville students' success on standardized New York State tests is mixed. The third grade's scores in both reading and mathematics on the 1984 Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) tests were above the state average; at the sixth grade level, however, both scores were well below the averages for all small schools (enrollment < 1100), all public schools, and all schools in New York. The superintendent considers this particular sixth grade result a fluke; the 1985 results were higher. The test results are presented below.

Pupil Evaluation Program 1984
% Students Above State Reference Point

	Grade 3 Reading	Grade 3 Mathematics	Grade 6 Reading	Grade 6 Mathematics
Knowville	79.0	93.0	61.0	71.0
All small schools	87.3	89.0	87.8	87.7
All public schools	77.2	80.0	77.5	77.5
All schools	78.5	80.5	78.7	78.4

At the high school level, the percentage of students passing Regents Examinations is well above average in all but two subject areas. In one of those subjects, Spanish, there are very few who even take the test; that easily distorts the value of the average. The Regents scores are below:

Regents Examinations 1984

	Knowville	All Small Schools	All Public Schools	All schools
English	100	87.1	85.0	86.0
Social Studies	91	81.3	77.5	78.6
Algebra	60	75.1	70.3	71.0
Geometry	91	80.1	77.0	76.1
Trigonometry	78	71.3	74.4	73.0
Biology	94	77.0	73.2	73.1
Chemistry	100	77.9	79.0	78.3
Physics	100	81.3	77.5	78.6
French	100	92.3	91.5	91.0
Spanish	0	93.1	93.3	92.9

The Superintendent is proud of the fact that no Knowville student has ever failed to graduate due to competency test requirements.

Extracurricular Activities

Knowville students are very involved in a variety of sports, musical activities, and clubs. Student participation is high, according to members of the faulty, administration, and student body. The guidance counselor estimates that roughly 40% of the high school students participate in extracurricular activities, a figure he considers high based on his experience.

The sports offered by Knowville are listed below:

Boys	Girls
Baseball	Softball
Track	Track
Soccer	Soccer
Varsity Basketball	Basketball
JV Basketball	Varsity Cheerleading
Cross Country	JV Cheerleading

There is also a small group of students working with one of the faulty members that keeps scores and statistics for these teams.

Of all the sports offered, only boys' basketball and girls' cheerleading have separate varsity and junior varsity squads. This does not please some of the parents of younger students, because the students often do not get much playing time until they are juniors or seniors. If there were junior varsity teams these freshmen and sophomores would probably be playing rather than sitting on the bench.

Knowville students are involved in a great variety of musical activities. These include:

Choir	Pep Band
Jazz Band	Music Association
Concert Band	

One of the most popular activities the school sponsors is a "cabaret" night each spring. It is done as a supper club; there is a meal, and then a music and dance show written and arranged by the music teacher. The cabaret night is very popular with the community. When asked about community involvement with the school it is always mentioned as something the community supports. It is well attended and highly praised.

In this particular district much of the credit for the success of cabaret night and the numerous bands must go to the music teacher/music department chairman. Besides teaching every period, he directs all the bands, makes arrangements for instrument repairs and purchases, and handles the publicity for all the public events. He is extremely proud of his program, but definitely feels overworked:

> I'm already overloaded and even what I'm teaching today is too much. I've asked for a reduction in my teaching load. I don't have time to do administrative-types-of-things; I don't have the title of administrator but I still have all that responsibility: instrument repairs, ordering instruments, ordering music, doing programs, all those other little things. There are little instrument repairs that I should be making and just don't have the time for.

Currently the elementary music classes are taught by a part-time teacher; the department chairman would like to see this person appointed full-time. Right now this does not appear likely to happen.

There is an interesting relationship between sports and music at Knowville. The athletic director leads the choir and plays in the jazz band. The music teacher, on the other hand, works with interested students to keep the statistics for the various sports, including soccer and basketball. Both men are supportive and understanding of each other's programs, and this is felt to lead to better integration and less competition between the two programs. It is an example of the type of interdependence that is believed to exist in small-rural schools.

There is a student government at Knowville consists of a 16-member student council. Also, the different classes in the high school elect class officers each year.

There are several academically oriented clubs at Knowville, such as the National Honor Society and Junior National Honor Society. Four students form a "Brain Game" team which competes with other high school teams in the area. There is also a language club and a computer club.

Knowville Central also sponsors a few "hobby clubs." There is a ski club, a ceramics club, and a photography club.

It should be pointed out that some of the students taking courses at BOCES belong to clubs there such as the Future Business Leaders of Tomorrow.

There are several committees at Knowville that involve students as well as others in the school. Knowville has a "Positive Attitude Committee" composed of students and faculty. This committee selects a high school "Student of the Month" each month, and an elementary school "Apple of My Eye" weekly from nominations submitted by students, faculty, and staff. The winners' pictures are posted in the main hallway and letters from the superintendent are sent home to their parents.

There is also an Educational Development Committee (EDC), and this is composed of Board Members, parents, teachers, and students. The EDC serves as an advisory board to the district on educational matters, and also participates in the appeal process for students on the ineligible list.

The number of activities available for the Knowville students is seen as an advantage for the students. Opportunities exist for students to be very involved in sports, music, and clubs, and the students seem to take advantage of those opportunities by being very involved in their school.

There are, however, people who do not see the large number of activities for the small number of students as an advantage. One faculty member does not like the fact that students are into everything and feels they should specialize more. A student who is very good in one area, say music, might also be on the baseball team (even though he is a poor ball player) and that takes away from the time he could devote to music. In a larger school that individual would probably have not made the baseball team. In this teacher's words, "You don't get the quality of performance that you could in a larger school."

It is not that this faculty member does not think this student ought to play baseball if he chooses, but rather that the time and energy this student needs to play interscholastic baseball might be better spent on music.

From a club advisor's point of view this can also be a problem. Members of the yearbook staff, for example, are also involved in athletics and as a result the yearbook advisor did much of the work the students might have done themselves.

The Knowville senior class goes on a trip every year. The destination changes from year to year, depending on where the class members want to go. The class of 1985, according to their

president, was a very close group and were in complete agreement as to where they should go on their trip: Williamsburg, Virginia. Other destinations have included Toronto, Boston, Montreal, and Washington, D.C. The students raise money for the trip through fund-raising activities beginning in seventh grade.

Like many districts, Knowville Central has had a policy that links permission to participate in extracurricular activities with classroom work.

In Knowville that policy was based on effort. The feeling was that to base it on a pass-fail system would penalize the students who were not academically oriented, but were trying. If the student was not working up to his or her potential, or not making at least an effort to, a teacher could designate that student's work "unsatisfactory." If a student received two of these "u's," the student was placed on the "U List" and could not participate in extracurricular activities until he or she satisfied all the teachers involved.

It was the first part of this policy that caused some difficulty for the district. A student with one "u" could still participate; as soon as he or she received a second "u," however, they became ineligible to participate until both were cleared up. Thus if a student had difficulty with one particular teacher, that one teacher could not alone put that student on the U List; once a student was on the list, however, one teacher could keep a student from getting off.

This happened in 1984, and the parents of the student involved and several members of the community brought the matter to the School Board. The Board abolished the eligibility policy, to the dismay of the teachers and coaches. Over the next several months a committee of teachers, Board members, and parents developed a new policy that was adopted by the Board in August, 1985. A text of the new policy follows:

Eligibility Policy

Teachers will notify students in writing at the end of the fourth week of their pending unsatisfactory performance rating. Official notification will be given to any student receiving two or more unsatisfactory performance ratings at the end of the fifth week and if he/she has not secured a release slip from the teacher who gave him/her an unsatisfactory performance rating and presented it to the guidance counselor within five days after official notification, he/she will become ineligible for participation in all extracurricular activities for the remainder of the five week period. Parents will be notified by the guidance counselor that their son/daughter is ineligible.

When a student is put on ineligibility list any time for a particular subject, the teacher is obligated to give the student an opportunity to get released. The student must meet the teacher's requirements before the end of the fifth school day following official notification.

Student performance ratings received for courses completed at the end of 20 week, 10 week, or 13 week period will not be considered for the ineligibility list.

A student may be prohibited from attending National Honor Society meetings when on the ineligibility list.

A student cannot be denied the opportunity to try out for or attend an extracurricular activity even though he/she is on the ineligibility list.

> Advisors of activities are responsible for enforcing the ineligibility list with the support of other staff members. NO LIST WILL BE POSTED, but each teacher will receive a copy of the list.
>
> Teachers will post their eligibility policy guidelines in the classroom at the beginning of the course.
>
> APPEAL PROCESS: Any student and/or parent wishing to appeal placement on the ineligibility list must first request a meeting with the teacher and superintendent. At this meeting the superintendent will hear oral arguments from the student/parent and teacher. The superintendent will issue a written ruling. Should the student/parent or teacher disagree with the superintendent's ruling, he/she may request a hearing before the EDC committee. A majority of the EDC will hear oral arguments from the student/parent and teacher and make a ruling. Should the student/parent or teacher be dissatisfied with the EDC ruling, he/she can request a hearing at the next regularly scheduled board meeting. After oral arguments from the student/parent and the teacher, the Board of Education will render a final decision. It is understood that the student is eligible while his/her appeal is being considered.

The controversy over the eligibility policy will be discussed further in section three.

Students are involved in activities outside of the school as well. Many enjoy outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing. The local bowling alley has a junior league and some of the students participate in that. Church activities such as choir involve some of the students also.

Overall, the situation in Knowville appears to be that of a small school that provides an adequate amount of courses, counseling, and activities to its students. This seems to be happening despite the fact that the building is acknowledged to be lacking in terms of both size and condition. The Board has

been trying to alleviate the building problem for many years now without success. The reasons for that failure are discussed in the next section.

The Physical Plant and Associated Problems

Knowville's crowding problems can be traced back to 1953. At that time the school added the first addition since the school was built in the late 1920s. At the time of the addition the district felt its state aid was too low to allow a major expansion; as a result the addition was built as cheaply as possible. In one sense this worked out well for the district; no asbestos insulation was used because it was too expensive. Thus the school has not had to spend money to remove asbestos later when it was discovered to be harmful.

Knowville had also been operating a small elementary school in a small town just south of Knowville. At the time of the 1953 addition there was some discussion of closing that building. The school remained open, because the residents felt they could not afford the extra work needed on the main building to accommodate the students from that school.

Already a pattern can be seen developing, namely that the district believes it is too poor to shoulder its share of building costs and must therefore cut corners and do the work as cheaply as possible. The formula for determining state aid is based on the financial situation of residents within a district,

but Knowville residents seem to feel that they are poorer than the formula indicates.

As mentioned above in section one, compared to its closest neighbors Knowville is poor, both in property wealth and income. But by statewide standards Knowville is not as poor as its residents seem to think.

In 1962 the district began acquiring portable trailer classrooms to alleviate the overcrowding that had already begun. That helped the situation for a while, but around 1970 a nearby common school district dissolved and Knowville picked up thirty students from that.

It was about this time that Knowville began exploring the possibility of constructing a new building. Because Knowville was recommended for reorganization in 1958 Master Plan, it was not eligible for State building aid. Thus the residents would have to pay the entire cost of construction and they were unable (or at least unwilling) to do so.

Knowville's building problem intensified in 1983 when the district had to close the small building it was operating out of town. The school was an old wooden structure located at the top of a narrow, steep, winding road; the district could not do the repairs necessary to bring the school into compliance with the State's new fire and safety codes, and finally the building was closed.

The State Education Department was aware that Knowville's building problem was reaching a critical point and that

something had to be done. After a careful review of Knowville's options, SED agreed to grant Knowville state aid for a new building, the amount of aid being based on the formula used statewide. Knowville was eligible for 53.6% aid; that is, if Knowville were to build a new school, the State would pay for over half of it.

An SED official stated that the reason for allowing building aid to Knowville was that SED was "tired of being blamed" for Knowville's space problem. In his opinion, Knowville had been using the State as a scapegoat for the lack of work on either renovation or a new building. Now, according to this official, "They have to do something."

In order to justify the building aid the State approved the plan to have the new school built near the BOCES occupational center; that way the special education students (from other districts as well as Knowville) could be mainstreamed into regular classrooms. Knowville's new school would contain some classrooms for BOCES to rent, an arrangement SED saw as beneficial to both Knowville and BOCES. For the first time, building aid for Knowville was approved.

In 1983 the School Board hired a recently retired District Superintendent to help them develop plans for a new building. A proposal was drawn up for a new K-12 school to be built on a piece of property near the BOCES occupational center. BOCES owned the property and used it to grow crops for the agriculture program. Knowville was to buy another piece of property near but

not adjacent to the BOCES center and exchange it for the proposed building site. (Otherwise BOCES would have to submit to a complicated and time-consuming process to purchase the land itself after selling the other piece of land to Knowville.) The cost of the program would have been about $4.2 million; with the 53.6% State aid, the residents would have had to pay less than $2 million.

The proposal was rejected by an 11:1 margin. The main reason given by members of the community for the defeat was location. The people did not want the school to leave the village.

Even for the community members willing to tolerate the school being out of the village the location was still a problem. As mentioned above, the piece of land being considered was used by the BOCES agriculture program for crops; it was also well known for being a wetland. It was referred to by the townspeople as "the swamp." There was concern about whether the building would crack in the soft soil. Also, there was some skepticism that even if a building could be built on that property, it would cost more than anticipated.

There was also some controversy over the piece of land Knowville was going to exchange for the new school site. Several community members complained that the land Knowville was going to buy and give to BOCES was <u>better</u> than what Knowville would get in return. Also, they felt that the price of the property was much higher than the price for similar property; one estimate had the district paying <u>five</u> <u>times</u> as much as normal for property in

Knowville. Overall, the community residents claim the location of the new school was the primary reason the proposal did not pass.

Some members of the community were concerned about the cost of a new school. The proposal called for 53.6% state building aid, which would have left the district responsible for just under $2 million. There were many older retired persons in Knowville who simply felt they could not afford the tax increase associated with a new school. Again, the case could have been that this was just their perception based on the relative wealth of their neighbors.

Another issue was what one local minister termed "accountability." There were other school buildings in the region the same age as the Knowville school that were in much better shape. The question being asked was why the Knowville building had been allowed to deteriorate so much, and what was to prevent similar neglect from taking place in a new building. Until that was resolved, some community members would not vote to spend a lot of money on a new school.

School personnel offer a rebuttal to this position. They blame the lack of community financial support for the condition of the building. If the School Board did not worry so much about keeping taxes low, they would not have had to keep deferring needed maintenance.

Also, the district had been trying for over 10 years to get permission (and therefore aid) from the State to build a new

school. During this period the Board did not want to invest a great deal of money in the old building, on a chance that the aid might be approved.

For some people in the community it was not only the building proposal itself but the way it was presented. As one long-time resident stated:

> I think the project went too long a period of time before the public was made aware of what had been recommended...just maybe the public should have been brought into the picture sooner.

Another suggestion from a veteran Knowville teacher:

> Frankly, I don't think they were open enough in the presentation, the Board and the people trying to plan it. They weren't open enough with the people; they didn't give them the options and the choices.
>
> It would have been difficult, but I think maybe they should have presented two or three options to the folks and given them a choice rather than saying this was it; either it stays as it is, or it goes down. I think if the community had been able to choose it might have gone further.

Perhaps if the option offered to the community had been for a new school to be built in the village, the reaction would have been different. There was clearly distrust on the part of the community about the motives of the retired District Superintendent who worked with the building committee. He was known to be a proponent of reorganization, and one of his last acts before retiring as District Superintendent was to dissolve a small. financially troubled district south of Collegetown. There was some fear that his ultimate goal was to merge Knowville

Central into the BOCES system, the result being that Knowville would no longer be a separate, locally operated school district, but a branch of the BOCES that happens to be in the town (not village) of Knowville and happens to have a basic academic program.

This retired District Superintendent played an important role in bringing the building plan to the public. He worked with the Board to develop plans for the school and assisted in the selection of architect, building site, etc. He whole-heartedly approved of the central school-by-BOCES concept. Knowville was too small to offer an adequate high school program, but it would be able to draw from students in the BOCES program. Knowville would also be able to share special education programs with BOCES.

As for the parcel of land the school was to be built on, the retired District Superintendent described it as "not so bad;" if drainage and the foundations were done properly a building would stand up there fine. The land was flat and would be cheap to develop.

According to the retired District Superintendent, he and the Knowville building committee did examine other potential sites but found none more suitable than the piece of land adjacent to the BOCES center.

Although the present District Superintendent agreed with the plan to build the new Knowville Central School near the Occupational Center, teachers at the Center were less than

enthusiastic about the proposal. Their main concern was safety. As one teacher stated:

> We run skidders, log skidders. We run bulldozers. We run chain saws. We've got cows which would be right across from the Center--or the school rather--if they built it over in the field. We had proposed to structure ponds, and we had that area utilized in a long term plan, but utilized for our class programs. We wanted to get a saw mill in.

The BOCES teachers were concerned that young students (and even older unexperienced students) might accidentally come in contact with the equipment and animals and perhaps injure themselves. This equipment makes a lot of noise, another potential problem for the new school.

The BOCES instructors were also concerned about security at the Center. The building is not open at night and they have not suffered significant vandalism. They were afraid that that would change with more people (not just Knowville students) congregating around the complex, especially at night for dances and athletic events.

School officials, community members, and State Education Department and BOCES officials have different and sometimes contradictory ideas as to what actually caused the proposition's defeat and why. For example, several community members claimed that the retired District Superintendent was primarily responsible for the plan to put the school near BOCES; the retired superintendent claims it was the building committee's idea.

Community members complained they were not given input into the proposal, just a yes-no vote on a completed plan. The Board and building committee did hold public meetings throughout the process, but very few people attended.

Another interesting contradiction in the Knowville building plan centered around the amount of state aid the district was eligible for. Based on the formula used to compute aid for all districts, Knowville was eligible for 53.6% aid; that is, the State would pay just over half the cost of the building. A local politician in Knowville claimed that other districts in the area (he refused to name them) have, on occasion, managed to get more than their computed building aid; for the new building plan he went to the State Senator representing the district and sought a special legislative grant to raise the State Aid to 75% of the total building cost, the additional money coming from General State funds, not the State Education Department.

The rationale for asking for more than the district was entitled to (by formula) was that since these other (unnamed) districts had received more than their computed aid, Knowville should, too. Neither the BOCES superintendent for the region including Knowville nor the State Education Department Bureau Chief for School District Organization, however, could recall any instance where such extra aid was given for a building project.

The final example of conflicting views toward the building project had to do with the piece of land the new school was to be built on. The descriptions of the property ranged from "swamp"

to "a little wet," depending upon whether or not the speaker opposed the location of the school.

Overall, those within the Knowville community blame the failure of the building proposition on the location outside of the village. The BOCES and State Education Department officials involved contend that the residents just do not want to spend the money and will continue to come up with excuses no matter what is proposed. The new building proposition being prepared at this time addresses the location problem as well as some of the other concerns raised about the last proposition. It remains to be seen whether the State and BOCES officials are correct and that Knowville voters will find some other reason to turn down a new building, scheduled to be voted on in October, 1986. The development of the new building proposal is described below.

The 1986 Building Proposal

Immediately following the defeat of the building proposition in 1984 work began on a new proposal; this time the local politician mentioned above assumed an important role on the building committee, and began to address the issues that had brought about the defeat.

Residents of Knowville had made it clear that they wanted the school to remain in the village. One possible site mentioned was the old school's athletic field on an elevated piece of land adjacent to the school. This site had not been considered the first time because it was too small to meet State requirements.

This obstacle has since been overcome; the owners of two pieces of property adjacent to the site have agreed to turn over their land to the district if the building proposition is passed. One owner would sell her property, the other would donate it. The District Superintendent and State Education Department officials are satisfied that the site is adequate.

According to the local politician and the school superintendent, there would be several advantages to this site besides the fact that it is in the village. Because it is so close to the old school building the present parking lot and bus garage could be used. Also, Knowville very recently spent $58,000 for a new septic system in the old school; a new school next door and up a hill would, with some additional pipes and pumps, be able to use that system, thus saving some money on the cost of a whole new system.

As mentioned above, there was some concern on the part of the voters as to whether or not they could afford a building program aided at 53.6%. If the legislation authorizing 75% aid is passed, the Board President predicted there would be a tax increase of about $8.00 per thousand on full value for the first year. Thus a family living in a $20,000 house (those the Board and building committee feel would have the most difficulty paying for a new school) could expect to pay $160 more in school taxes the first year. This increase, according to the superintendent, would be partially offset by a potential decrease in the amount the district pays for insurance. For insurance purposes, school

buildings are classified according to such factors as age, open or closed stairwells, etc., and different classes have traditionally paid different amounts for insurance. The proposed K-12 building in Knowville would put the district in a class with lower insurance costs, though the Board President and superintendent are hesitant to make predictions, with the insurance industry in general being in such turmoil. In 1984-85 Knowville paid $20,000 in insurance; that amount jumped to $52,000 in 1985-86 and is expected to be in the area of $90,000 in 1986-87. Knowville's total operating budget for 1986-87 is slightly under $2.2 million, so insurance is no minor item in the budget. If the Board and building committee were able to convince the voters that the potential savings in insurance would offset some of the construction costs, the case for a new building would be that much stronger.

The administration in Knowville has also taken steps to overcome the "accountability" issue. Since the defeat of the first building proposition the maintenance staff at the school has been replaced and the new staff is working hard to improve the image of the building. They have done some renovations in the school basement, building new offices down there for the superintendent, assistant superintendent and school secretary/district clerk. They turned the old offices upstairs into much-needed classroom space. According to one local resident, the change has been noticed and appreciated in the community.

For those who consider the superintendent to be responsible for the condition of the building there is the knowledge that the current superintendent has submitted his resignation effective June 30, 1987.

The local politician who has been so active regarding a new building believes that it has covered all possible objections to the new building proposition. He, along with the Board and administration in Knowville, is optimistic that the proposition will pass. The District Superintendents (both present and former) and State Education Department officials, however, still feel the voters will come up with some excuse to turn the building down. It remains to be seen who is correct.

These experiences over the past few years with the building proposals in Knowville demonstrate some characteristics of the School Board that help contribute the inability of the district to deal with its problems, particularly the building situation. To some degree the Board has allowed others in the community to take the lead on resolving major issues. This is evident in both building proposals: the first time, it was the retired District Superintendent who was in part responsible for the development of the proposal which was later defeated by an 11:1 margin; it is understandable that he might be that out of touch with the community's feelings on this. One might think, however, that the Board should have been able to anticipate the voters' reactions to a plan to move the school out of the village. It is interesting that immediately following the building proposal

defeat three Board members (including the president) were re-elected; the Board members were far enough removed from the proposal that its overwhelming defeat did not affect their bid for re-election.

The moving force behind the new building proposal seems to be a local politician who recognizes that something has to be done and is willing to take the lead. He has been working with the Board, SED, the State legislature, and local community groups to get a new school in the village. As with the first proposal, the Board is involved but not at the lead.

There has been a consistent pattern throughout the years of the Board not being able to promote long-range planning in Knowville. In the early 1950's when the building addition was being considered the Board knew that the small school it was operating out of the village was not going to last forever. Perhaps if the Board had pushed the community then to make the changes necessary in the main building to incorporate the students from that school, the situation would not be so problematic today. If the special legislation authorizing the additional funding for the new school is passed, Knowville would have the opportunity to get a new, modern school for approximately one million dollars. Yet there is some concern that the Board may not be able to convince the voters to spend even that amount of money.

As mentioned several times above, Knowville voters seem to believe they are poorer than they actually are. Instead of

trying to convince the voters otherwise, the Board has gone along with this perception. For example, the Board requested the special legislation for extra funds for a new school, and in so doing argued that the district cannot afford to go it alone. If the special legislation is not passed, it will be very difficult to convince the voters that they should go ahead with the building anyway. Moreover, from the State's perspective it is hardly obvious that passing this legislation is a good idea. It would set a dangerous precedent and would invite any number of other districts to claim "special" hardship.

One argument made in support of the need for the special legislation concerned the average income of the residents of Knowville. The average income in 1983, according to county records, was about $19,000. The records also show that only 12% of the population make above that figure, and the majority of people in Knowville actually earn less. On the surface, this argument appears reasonable. Upon closer examination, however, the argument loses weight because of the fact that school aid formulas are based on property wealth as well as income.

The Knowville Board will have an opportunity to make a major change in the district in the summer of 1987, when it selects the first new superintendent in almost a quarter century. Because the current superintendent has made his intention to retire known so early the Board will have of time to evaluate carefully the type of individual to best guide Knowville over the next few years. The Board has already indicated that the District

Superintendent will be asked to assist in the recruitment and selection process. The District Superintendent considers this an opportunity for the State to have some input into the governance of the Knowville district.

Whether this will be enough to change Knowville's perception of itself as the "poor neighbor" remains to be seen. It must be remembered that the superintendent serves at the mercy of the School Board and can only make fundamental changes with the Board's support. In the end, the fate of Knowville's school lies in the hands of the community and their elected representatives.